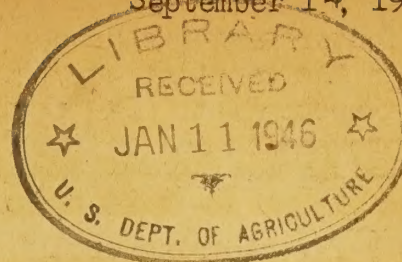


September 14, 1944

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A COMMUNITY SEWING CENTER

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General Situation in State, and One Specific Need

During the year 1942, available supplies in ready-made clothing and yard goods became limited in many parts of the State of Vermont.

The extension clothing specialist and her advisory committee of three home demonstration agents, felt it desirable to help homemakers meet their clothing needs resulting from the aforementioned situation. One need was for women to be given the opportunity to get help locally in making or remodeling garments for their children and themselves.

As a result, on the program of suggested clothing projects for home demonstration clubs was one called, "The Community Sewing Center." Home demonstration clubs were encouraged to sponsor a community sewing center; the clubs to invite a clothing leader or a community seamstress to take over a series of meetings and to give help in sewing and other clothing problems to all women desiring such help. Help in planning such a center would be available from the county home demonstration agent or the State clothing specialist.

Background of One Community in Caledonia County

East Burke consists of a small farming community and village nestled down on the side of Burke Mountain in Caledonia County, Vermont. The people are of Yankee stock of average circumstances. Farming, on a small scale, is perhaps the chief occupation. The wage earners in the village families work in the woods or help on nearby farms. The community life centers around the usual organizations connected with the one school, one church, and a fine community building and library. This building was built by a loyal and wealthy former resident. An active home demonstration club and a 4-H Club function in the community. No doubt, many of the people belong to the Grange in the town or nearby community.

Interested Leader in Community

In this community on a hillside farm live a young couple and their family. Mrs. Stella Farmer has been a loyal and enthusiastic home demonstration clothing club leader for many years.

Several years ago, she attended a tailoring project held in the county with the State extension specialist in clothing in charge. The specialist and home agent, during these meetings, noted the ability and interest of Mrs. Farmer. She was encouraged in doing more and better work. Soon she reported doing more and more tailoring, and now she is the community dressmaker.

1 One of a series of case histories prepared for use in the conference To Outline the Contribution of Extension Methods and Techniques Toward the Rehabilitation of War-torn Countries, held in Washington, D. C., September 19 to 22, 1944.

Extension Service and Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations cooperating.

2 Extension specialist in clothing, Vermont Extension Service.



This woman, in her late twenties or early thirties, does her sewing work as a hobby to help out with family finances.. She frankly admits that the help and training gained from the Extension Service clothing program have given her confidence to sew for her neighbors. She and her husband have planned and equipped a sewing room in their home.

#### Plan for Community Sewing Center in East Burke

By fall of 1942, Mrs. Farmer was president of her home demonstration club. The home demonstration agent reports: "In the years she has run her workshop and attended extension clothing meetings, her confidence and skill increased until she was willing and eager to give help and training to her local women in just such a project as the community sewing center."

She wrote the home agent for more information. The agent in turn asked the clothing specialist to assist in this request. Since this was the first such request, the agent wanted to help in analyzing the situation and in organizing the center.

The specialist and home agent conferred with Mrs. Farmer. She had studied the local situation and knew the limitations of local supplies and the needs of homemakers. She thought there were at least a dozen women who were having difficulty with clothing for their families. As she said, "Many of these women know little about sewing, and they do not belong to our club. They need the help and have asked for it. It would not interfere with my dressmaking because they can't afford, or would not have, a dressmaker anyhow."

After discussing the pros and cons of the whole situation at this conference meeting, the plan for the East Burke Community Sewing Center, as described below, was worked out. Mrs. Farmer carried out the plan without too much additional help or change from the original plan.

At the conference, a date was set for an all-day clothing meeting with the clothing specialist in charge. The home demonstration agent sent notices to women with children; a list of the names of these women was supplied by Mrs. Farmer. The notice stated that on a certain day the clothing specialist would be at the East Burke Community House from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. to help any women with problems in making or remaking children's clothing. Mrs. Farmer and home demonstration club women talked to these women about the meeting; Mrs. Farmer told members of her 4-H Club to tell their mothers about the meeting.

The community house in the village was the logical meeting place. It was heated, had many conveniences such as good lights and plenty of table space, and was used for all community affairs. The home demonstration club women arranged for sewing machines.

Ten or twelve women came to the first meeting, each bringing something to work on. Some of the women knew little about sewing or use of patterns, others merely wanted additional advice. Mrs. Farmer and the specialist brought an assortment of patterns.

Mrs. Farmer, through an arrangement at the preliminary conference, was to observe methods of teaching as done by the specialist at this meeting. In other words, the specialist while helping and teaching the women was also attempting to show the leader how to teach others.



Children's garments were cut from new or old materials, women's dresses were fitted, an old coat was remodeled into a child's coat. All kinds of help was given by the specialist, the home agent, and Mrs. Farmer.

Each woman had brought her lunch. A member of the home demonstration club made coffee for the group. By lunching together at noon a social time was included in the day's work.

As the day progressed, it was evident the women enjoyed themselves and could see how much help they were getting. Toward the end of the afternoon, the group was called together. An extension service publication on children's clothing and publications on other clothing topics pertinent to the day's work were given those present.

The specialist explained the possibilities for more help in the future and that Mrs. Farmer would be willing to help the women. The women present were enthusiastic. They said they might not come every time, but would appreciate the help.

It was made clear that Mrs. Farmer would be in charge of all subsequent meetings, and that she could get literature and exhibits, or ask for help from the agent or specialist. She did this occasionally when women asked for information or techniques she was not sure about.

The group decided that the meetings should be held every few weeks at the community house. The women were to bring any problem in sewing on which they wished help, not necessarily one regarding children's clothing. This was merely used at the first meeting as a means of getting women to the meeting. They decided at this time who were to bring sewing-machine and other equipment, meeting hours, etc.

### Success of Plan

According to the home demonstration agent's report: "Through 1 year's time, Mrs. Farmer has held 25 sewing meetings with a total of 21 different women taking advantage of the help." The average attendance was 7. Though more could have been handled, this was a sufficient number for a local leader to work with at a construction meeting. Many more would make an unwieldy group and necessitate bringing in too much equipment in this particular situation.

Mrs. Farmer kept a record of what the women accomplished. Seventy-seven garments were made or remodeled, as well as several sets of pressing pads and three dress forms. Demonstrations were given also by Mrs. Farmer on the use of sewing-machine attachments and on short cuts in sewing.

The garments made or remodeled included tailored coats, jackets, capes; women's slips, housedresses; boys' suits, blouses, and shirts; girls' slips, dickeys, pinafores, skirts, and dresses.

Whenever the specialist was in the county and when the leader attended meetings, any problems were discussed. The specialist and agent would suggest ways of improving the work, or exhibits and literature that could be obtained from county or State office.

Mrs. Farmer was encouraged to have an exhibit at the end of the year. The home demonstration agent attended the review and reported as follows: "During the afternoon about 30 women from the community came to see what had been done. The



agent felt the workmanship was good. The variety of garments worked on showed the versatile skill with which Mrs. Farmer had instructed her pupils. The enthusiasm and sustained interest from her own community speaks volumes for Mrs. Farmer's accomplishments. There were many days during the winter when the snow had drifted or it was too slippery to ride. This faithful leader arrived on foot to carry on her class as scheduled." At times when Mrs. Farmer was unusually busy, the women came to her house where she supervised their work in between times while doing her own work.

### Evaluation of Results

This example shows how an interested local leader with no more than average education (in this State) or preliminary training can be developed into a good leader, a good teacher, and into a person willing to help others in her community.

On the whole, not much time other than with organization was devoted by the agent or specialist to getting and keeping this project under way. The specialist spent  $1\frac{1}{2}$  days, while the home demonstration agent probably spent  $2\frac{1}{2}$  days on the project.

Although the sewing center was sponsored by the home demonstration club, more non-members than members were helped. Twenty-one needy women helped is a good proportion for this small community, and the project a good one for this community.

The women were helped with definite problems at times when they needed the assistance. These women will be able to use the training in solving future clothing construction or renovation problems.

The success of this project, no doubt, is due to the following facts:

1. The women had immediate problems in getting or making clothing for their families.
2. There was an enthusiastic leader, respected in the community, who was willing to give of her time, energy, and information.
3. The situation was studied first, and then a plan of procedure worked out by the home demonstration agent, specialist, and leader before the project was started.
4. The group had a choice in saying whether they wished to continue before the project progressed beyond one meeting.
5. The leader was given definite help and encouragement as to how to proceed, where to turn for help, and what phases of work to attempt.
6. Members of the sponsoring club, the home demonstration club, felt they were doing a patriotic job.

The project will probably continue as long as the need for it exists, as long as the good relationship between group and leader continues, or as long as the present leader or another leader has time to devote to it. One problem that should be considered if this type of project is being considered is, to have an assistant who might be able to carry on if and when the leader can no longer carry on. This was not planned for in the East Burke Community Sewing Center.



The home agent did give the project some publicity. A better plan for the publicity might have been worked out as a means of drawing interest in other communities for similar centers.

It must be recognized that this project has its limitations; mainly that there must be a need for it, and a potential or interested leader to assume the responsibility within the community.



